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ABSTRACT

The keeping of journals by students in the basic speech course is the focus of this paper, which is divided into three parts. Part 1 examines the benefits of journal use to students and teachers and points out that three types of learning can thus be encouraged: the development of thinking skills, personal growth, and content learning. It also contains an excerpt from one student's journals. Part 2 lists 12 reasons for using journals in class and contains guidelines for their use that answer questions about evaluation, length and frequency of assignments, and choice of topics. Part 3 provides specific suggestions for journal assignments that correspond to topics covered in most basic speech courses. (EL)

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THE USE OF STUDENT JOURNALS IN THE BASIC SPEECH COURSE

A paper for consideration for the SCA Convention, November 1985

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CS 505 160

The Use of Student Journals in the Basic Speech Course

The keeping of journals by students in the basic speech course can be of benefit to both teacher and students. Any curricular strategy which produces higher levels of student learning and facilities course improvement should be welcomed. The purpose of this paper is to explore reasons for using journals and to offer guidelines for their use. The paper is divided into three parts: Part I examines benefits of journal use to students and teacher; Part II suggests guidelines for the use of journals; Part III provides specific suggestions for journal assignments which correspond to topics covered in most basic speech courses.

Part I - Benefits of Journals to Students and Teachers

Three potential advantages result from the use of journals. First, journals facilitate student learning. Three different types of learning can be encouraged by using journals in a variety of ways. The first type of learning is the development of thinking skills. Most speech communication teachers consider their course one which teaches students to think as well as to speak. It is a rare speech text that does not overtly teach reasoning patterns and fallacies and covertly teach thinking skills when discussing organization, language, critical listening, etc.

The connection between writing and thinking is central to the growth of thinking skills through journal writing. Toby Fulwiler, a member of the National Writing Project Advisory Board, claims that, "Writing, an act of cognition, can help students to learn..."[1] The connection between language and thought was described as "inner speech" by Vygotsky who argued that "Thought is born through words...thought unembodied in words remains a shadow."[2] Britton supports this view and claims that words give concrete form to thought, thus

making it more real.[3] The advantage of using written symbols is stressed by Emig who points out that the act of writing allows the writer to manipulate thought in unique ways. Making thoughts visable encourages the writer to design and develop ideas, modifying and relating them to each other, thus developing a train of thought.[4]

The second type of learning fostered by journal writing is personal growth. The importance of self understanding is frequently mentioned in textbooks as a speech course objective. For example, Adler and Rodman contend in the preface to their text that they have observed that most students "appreciate learning about scholarship that will help them understand themselves and those around them."[5] Self concept is taught as integral to interpersonal communication and topic choice in public speaking. By putting in writing parts of their "inner speech" students have a written record of their thinking. Periodic review of their own written ruminations often provides insight into their beliefs, values, and opinions. Fulwiler maintains that a journal "can be a documentary of both academic and personal growth, a record of evolving insight as well as the tool used to gain that insight."[6]

The third type of learning encouraged by journal writing is content learning. In speech communication most instructors feel there is a body of knowledge to be assimilated by students. The knowledge may be thought of as "theory" or "prescriptive rules", a combination of the two, or some other form of information. Nevertheless, each teacher feels it is necessary to <u>know</u> something about speech communication. By using journals, students use the act of writing to reinforce already learned concepts (repetition), gain new insights into the implications of learned materials (discovery), and personalize class instruction (internalize).

In addition to providing an incentive for student learning, journals include a pay-off for the teacher. Reading journals offers teachers a great

deal of insight into students' reaction to the course in general and to specific components in particular. It is extremely helpful to learn from students immediately after a class exercise, film, or guest speaker, what their reaction was. In addition to discovering what parts of the course were well received, the teacher receives diagnostic information. Misunderstandings and confusion can be detected before the exam. Concepts can be clarified for the current class and adjustments can be made in future semesters to continually make the course meet student needs. The type of information provided teachers is limited only by the assignments made and questions asked.

The following page contains a series of excepts from one student's journals. Notice the varied kinds of information she provided the teacher.

January 27, 1984

What a neat time we had in class today. We took a look at defense mechanisms and I was surprised about how much we actually do use them. I find myself using them alot when I refer to my weight. I really loved it when we had to do our little skits on the use of defense mechanisms. Not only did I have fun but I realized that I wasn't as nervous about getting up in front of the class!! YEAH!!

February 24, 1984

My sheild speech didn't do as well as I intended it to. I don't know why, but I still get alittle nervous when I do it. I hope I get a descent grade.

We are still missing Kurt from our group. We're hoping he'll be back in enough time to start practicing with us-we've only got four more days till we have to do it.

We have another meeting Sunday night in the Union-I'll let you know how it went.

March 5, 1984

Well, seeing as I still haven't received my group grade as yet; and seeing that this is the last entry before spring break-I thought I'd recap the semester a bit to see some of the progress I've made.

First of all, I'm really beginning to feel comfortable in the class. I think (I guess I know) that's got alot to do with how much more comfortable I feel speaking now v.s. speaking at the beginning of the semester. My voice doesn't quaver as much and I can feel myself pacing, not rushing, through my speeches. I guess something that's really helped me was the fact that we all go through speech apprehension at some time.

Second, I've learned about working in groups. There are many pro's and con's to it-but all in all our group assignment was well worth it. I do feel that we should get more points than 15-Geez, we've worked so hard on it!

I hope the second half of the semester goes as well as the first half did!!

April 9, 1984

Tommorow's assignment was made in preparation for our persuasion speeches and we were suppose to read Chapter 13 in our speech books. Basically, it wasn't new material-it just centered on the different aspects used to support your speech. It talked about the four reasons we use supporting material, etc.

I thought the reading was pretty general and basic knowledge. I'm really starting to look forward to writing my speech to use all of the materials we've learned about!!

USING JOURNALS IN CLASS

1. To START DISCUSSIONS
2. To SUMMARIZE LESSONS/IDEAS
3. To REFOCUS LOST CLASSES
4. To SOLVE PROBLEMS
5. To RESPOND TO READINGS/FILMS/SPEAKERS
6. To GENERATE PAPER TOPICS
7. To LET OFF STEAM
8. To SET PRIORITIES/SCHEDULES
9. To EVALUATE PERSONAL ACADEMIC PROGRESS
10. To "FREE WRITE" AND "BRAINSTORM"
11. To BE A RECORD OF GROWTH
12. To LEARN TO LIKE TO WRITE

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Part II - Guidelines for the Use of Journals in the Basic Speech Course

When using journals in a basic speech course several decisions need to be make all of which affect the quality of the experience for both students and teachers. The following are questions which need to be answered before the assignment is made.

1. How often should students write?

It is important that the entries be frequent and regular. A minimum number is usually necessary; 3 per week is the most commonly used minimum. There are those who argue that quantity is important and that required entries should also be of a minimum length. Encourage students to write entries beyond the minimum number.

2. Should grammar and spelling be considered when evaluating the journals?

Journal entries are usually considered informal writing. Entries are usually in first-draft form, having been neither revised nor edited. Teacher reaction should focus on content rather than grammar and spelling. A student should not be required to stop in the middle of an entry to look up a word in the dictionary when the interruption would interfere with the writing. It is possible, however, to assign more formal pieces and to specify that the standards for this assignment will include form. Another possibility is to offer the class the opportunity to talk to you about their writing if they would like that kind of feedback. What is to be avoided is a student receiving a comment such as the following to an entry which revealed personal insight --

Journal -- "I finaly see the role of self-concept plays in my relationship with my mother..."

Reaction - "You mispelled finally."

3. How often should I collect the journals?

The more often you collect them, the more immediate the feedback both you and the students receive. The number can vary from twice a semester to

once a week. If the journals are loose-leaf binders the students can continue to write entries while you have the journals. Your schedule will also be a determining factor since you should read and return them as soon as possible. If you assign journals in more than one class you may need to stagger the collections. A collegue had used journals in the past when he taught part-time. In his first year of full-time teaching he assigned journals as usual, only to discover at mid-term he had 125 journals to read! Feasibility may limit the number of classes in which you use journals. To encourage students to keep journals up-to-date you may want to require that they routinely be brought to class and do a few impromptu collections.

4. Who reads the journals?

Students should be assured confidentiality and it should be strictly adhered to. An exception is an assignment made to be shared with the class. This should be stated as part of the directions, "Write a definition of _____ and be prepared to read it to the class." It is also useful at times to ask for volunteers to read specific journal assignments to the class.

5. How can I prevent students from writing things that are inappropriately revealing and which I would rather not read?

You can't. It is not wise to tell students what <u>not</u> to write; the choice of topic needs to remain open, the level of self disclosure the writer's choice. Any negative directions you give ("Don't write...") will stifle student writing. It is essential the journal become a safe place to write anything. The learning and growth advantages depend upon this freedom.

You will read things you wish you didn't know. What you do about this knowledge depends upon the situation. Personal problems which sound serious should be handled with the help of a trained counselor. Oftentimes the journal serves the purpose of empathic listening and the writer needs no response. It is always helpful, however, to let students know you are available to talk

if they should want to.

6. How do I evaluate the journals?

There are several ways to handle evaluation, including no evaluation. The journals may be collected and checked for the minimum number of entries and then counted as an assignment completed or not completed. You can use an additional qualitative form of evaluation including either a ✓, +, or - system or a letter or point grade. Criteria for grading should be made clear including the role of:

a. The minimum number of entries

b. The basis for evaluation

(1) insight shown

(2) use of personal experiences

(3) inclusion of materials from outside readings

(4) clarity of writing

(5) quality of answers to questions

7. What will the students write?

There are six types of journal entries. You may focus on one of them or use a combination.

a. Free-form entries in which students choose the topic

b. Reactions to class activities which may be simple reactions or the answer to a specific question about an activity

c. Reactions to reading assignments from the textbook or outside readings

d. Relating of examples from the student's real life that exemplify concepts learned in class

e. Answers to questions posed by the teacher

f. Written assignments

Part III - Sample Journal Assignments

Topic	Journal Assignment
Communication - Definition & Process	Choose an authoritative definition of communication or devise one of your own. Review the events that occurred to you yesterday and use one as an example of your definition and another to illustrate events that you do not consider communication.
Perception/Self-Concept	Put your self-concept in writing. Who do you think you are? When you've finished, choose someone who knows you really well and compare what you think their concept of you is with your own. Now compare your present self-concept to what you would have written a year ago.
Language	Cut out a magazine or newspaper ad and put it in your journal. Examine the connotation of the words used. What image or attitude about the product are the writers trying to convey? What words help create this image? What effect would changing some of the words have? Give an example of a change that would affect the reader's impression.
Listening	Analyze your strengths and weaknesses as a listener. In what situations do you listen effectively? In what situations do you have difficulty? List a set of behaviors you could use to improve the quality of your listening in those situations.
Nonverbal Communication	Pretend you are a novelist just beginning a new novel. Select one of your major characters. Describe in detail the personal qualities you will assign to him or her (clever/dull, educated/ignorant, ugly/beautiful, etc.) Then describe how you will communicate these to the reader in ways other than dialogue. In other words, how will you describe the character nonverbally including his or her appearance, home, possessions, etc. to create the impression of the character you want in the reader?

Topic	Journal Assignment
Interpersonal Communication	Choose someone with whom you have a close interpersonal relationship. Describe one of the sources of conflict that exists between the two of you. What is one topic or issue about which you do not agree? Clearly state both your side and your partner's side of the issue. What effect does this conflict have on the relationship? What approaches to conflict resolution might you use to resolve the conflict or to prevent it from damaging the relationship? Write a follow-up entry in which you report the results of the use of the above approaches.
Small Group Communication	Select a problem that is of concern to you. It can be personal (Should I break up with my girl/boyfriend?) or academic (How can I raise my grades this semester?) or connected to your future plans (Should I go home at break or to Florida with friends?). Use Dewey's problem solving sequence to analyze your problem. Put each step in writing. Write a follow-up entry to report what happened when you implemented your chosen solution.
Choosing a Speech Topic	Pick up a copy of today's paper (school, local, or national). Have your journal with you as you read it. Every time you find a topic that interests you (those you are reading are the ones that interest you) write it down. Write down <u>every</u> topic you read about and any others that come to you as you're reading. When you're done, re-read the list adding any other topics you think of. Now go over the list and put a star next to those that fit the assignment and that sound most interesting to you.
Organization	Write three different introductions for a speech on the value of saving money. Indicate what type of introduction each one is.
Supporting Material	Cut out a newspaper or magazine ad and put it in your journal. What claims are made about the product? What evidence is used to support those claims? What claims are implied about the product? What evidence is used to support these? Evaluate the quality of the evidence used.

Topic	Journal Assignment
	If the claims are not adequately supported suggest types of evidence which would make the claims more believable.
Informatiive Speaking	Choose a process (grilling hamburgers, washing hair, etc.) and list the steps necessary to perform it. When the list is complete reread it. What assumptions did you made about the reader? What steps did you leave out? Could someone perform the process just by reading your directions?
Persuasive Speaking	After choosing a topic for your persuasive speech write down all the information about your audience that would be helpful in developing and adapting your topic. Frame three questions you could ask your audience to obtain the information you deem most essential.

Notes

[1]Fulwiler, Toby, "Writing: An Act of Cognition," in New Directions for Teaching and Learning, C.W. Griffin (ed.) (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1982), p. 15.

[2]Vygotsky, L.S., Thought and Language. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962), p. 149.

[3]Britton, J. and others, "Writing to Learn and Learning to Write," in The Humanity of English (Urbana, IL.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972).

[4]Emig, J., "Writing as a Mode of Learning," College Composition and Communication, 1977, pp. 122-128.

[5]Adler, R. and G. Rodman, Understanding Human Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), p. v.

[6]Fulwiler, Toby. "Journals Across the Discipline." English Journal, 69 (Dec. 1980), p. 18.